

CANCER

THE RIGHT THING



Understanding the problem:

Cancer is the most lethal disease in the U.S., responsible for one out of every four deaths. According to American Cancer Society estimates, nearly 1.4 million new cancer cases will be diagnosed this year. This means Kaiser Permanente can expect roughly 25,000 new cases of cancer within its membership annually.

Earlier detection and treatment advances continue to reduce overall mortality. The number of Americans living with cancer increased from 3 million in 1971 (1.5% of the population) to 9.8 million in 2001 (3.5% of the population). This number is predicted to increase by another 50% by the year 2050.

Cancer survivors include children and adults. The five-year survival rate for childhood cancers increased from 58% in 1975 to 82% in 2000; nearly 75% of cancer survivors diagnosed before the age of 15 will be alive after 10 years. Five years after diagnosis, 64% of adults will be alive. Of the 9.8 million American cancer survivors, 14% were diagnosed more than 20 years ago. Survivors between the ages of 50 and 85 represent 70% of all patients with cancer.

Defining a solution:

Even when the disease has been permanently arrested, cancer survivors share unique physical, emotional, and psychological concerns. These issues continue whether patients are in remission



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or have passed the relapse risk period. By focusing on cancer survivorship, CMI is helping KP rethink and redesign the way cancer care is delivered.

Comprehensive programs to address the long-term needs of people who live with, through, and beyond cancer are at the cutting edge of health care. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and the Lance Armstrong Foundation joined forces to lead a public health effort to address the issues faced by cancer survivors. The National Cancer Institute and the American Society of Clinical Oncology have also initiated recent efforts to address cancer survivorship.

Working with a multidisciplinary, interregional team of oncology clinicians, KP CMI is identifying ways to improve care for cancer survivors and their family members and caregivers.

Improving care in the acute phase:

Caring for Kaiser Permanente members with cancer is a complex charge. Numerous diagnoses, disease stages within diagnoses, and rapidly evolving clinical protocols make treatment both intricate and highly variable.

However, certain accompanying conditions are so common as to be nearly universal. By focusing on the management of these conditions, KP CMI's goal is to increase the effectiveness of cancer care throughout Kaiser Permanente and reduce the burden that these experiences impose on members who have been diagnosed with cancer. KP CMI has developed treatment models and clinical guidelines that address the most debilitating side effects of cancer treatment, such as anemia, susceptibility to infection, nausea and vomiting, and cancer-related pain.

KP HealthConnect, Kaiser Permanente's state-of-the-art electronic health record, also helps to ensure that evidence-based guidelines, such as those for the pharmacologic management of pain, anemia, and fever, are quickly implemented on a widespread basis. With guidelines translated to point-of-care electronic decision supports in KP HealthConnect, their effective use will increase.

Due to multiple medications and intricate treatment protocols, cancer survivors are at high risk for preventable medication errors and adverse events. KP HealthConnect offers a safety solution that could provide alerts and reminders to improve care for cancer survivors. A collaborative effort between KP CMI and Epic Systems, KP HealthConnect's developer and vendor, is creating an oncology information technology product that will address these patient safety issues while meeting the high standards of KP oncology clinicians.

Identifying persistent issues:

Once the acute phase of treatment is over, many of the symptoms associated with cancer and cancer treatment can become chronic in nature. These include pain, fatigue, nausea, hair loss, persistent swelling, decreased sexual functioning, loss of fertility, changes in bodily functions (e.g., colostomy or laryngectomy), and changes in appearance as a result of necessary surgery. In addition, major physical issues of long-term cancer survival include recurrence of the original disease, development of secondary cancers, premature aging, and organ failure.

In psychological and emotional terms, depression and anxiety can occur among cancer survivors, as can fear of recurrence, impaired self-esteem and body image, issues related to premature menopause, impotence, and incontinence, and impaired quality of life.

Exploring new solutions:

Palliative care focuses on relieving the physical symptoms of cancer and its treatment, such as pain and fatigue. Educating primary care clinicians about the importance of palliative care, in addition to cancer treatment protocols, would help to increase its effective use.

Self-care is key for cancer survivors. Changing behaviors through programs addressing smoking cessation, weight management, nutrition, pain and fatigue management, and exercise can increase quality of life over the long term.

Support for the unique psychosocial needs of cancer survivors can come from programs internal to KP, such as behavioral health. As an alternative or in addition to internal resources, collaborative relationships with community-based organizations such as the American Cancer Society expand the menu of support options available to KP members.

Tracking success:

Until recently, there was no way to compare one cancer care program against another for program improvement purposes. However, KP CMI researchers recently participated in a National Committee for Quality Assurance taskforce to develop cancer quality of care measures. Cancer measures are currently being developed in four areas: breast cancer, colon cancer, prostate cancer, and symptom management. Measures will be pilot tested within Kaiser Permanente and at Intermountain Health Care over the next two years.